Met Office

NEWS

A decade of flood forecasting

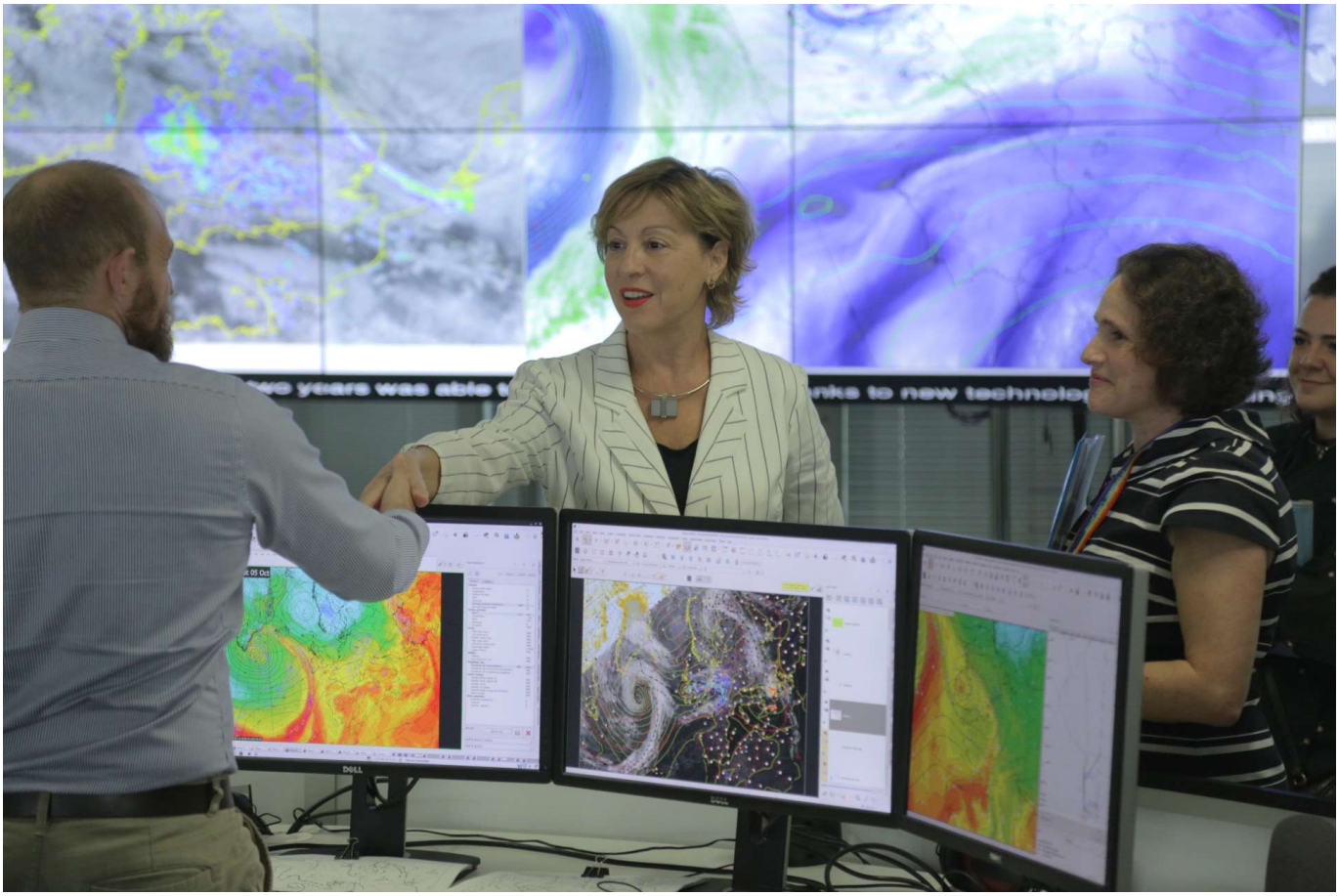
Author: Press Office
14:00 (UTC+1) on Fri 4 Oct 2019

Today the Met Office and the Environment Agency are marking a 10-year partnership which has saved lives, livelihoods, and protected infrastructure.

This has led to an evolution in the UK's ability to forecast, mitigate against and respond to flood events. The Flood Forecasting Centre (FFC) was set up in 2009 bringing together Met Office meteorologists and Environment Agency hydrologists to provide crucial, timely warnings to emergency responders helping them make the critical decisions that save livelihoods and keep people safe.

Floods Minister Rebecca Pow said: "It has been fascinating to see first-hand the incredible work taking place at the Flood Forecasting Centre as we celebrate its 10-year anniversary. This week alone, the FFC's forecasts have helped colleagues at the Environment Agency to issue well over 200 flood alerts and warnings to help keep homes, businesses and communities safe.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how the FFC develops an even deeper understanding of how we predict and prepare for weather events over the coming years. This work builds on the government's £2.6 billion investment in new flood schemes to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021."



Floods Minister Rebecca Pow meets Chief Meteorologist Steve Ramsdale and Met Office Chief Executive Professor Penny Endersby

The FFC was set up in 2009, following recommendations made in the Pitt Review, to better understand how rainfall impacts river catchments and flash flooding. Over the 10 years since its inception it has helped reduce the impact of a number of extreme weather events, including:

Wainfleet, June 2019 – parts of Lincolnshire saw around 2.5 times the monthly average rainfall between 10-12 June. The Met Office issued severe weather warnings for rain several days in advance enabling the Flood Forecasting Centre to provide timely, key information to the Environment Agency incident room in Lincoln which was then able to issue a severe flood warning to local residents. This led to the successful evacuation of around 600 homes – meaning nobody was harmed.

Winter storms of 2013/14, From mid-December to early January, the UK experienced a spell of extreme weather as a succession of major winter storms brought widespread impacts to the UK. Initially most of the weather impacts related to the strong winds, however, as rainfall totals accumulated the focus of concern turned to flooding, including large river catchments such as the Severn and Thames. FFC guidance enabled emergency responders and local communities to make strategic decisions, such as moving huge water pumps onto the Somerset Levels, which mitigated impacts and protected lives and property.

Met Office Chief Executive Professor Penny Endersby said; “Climate projections (UKCP18) suggest that whilst the UK may begin to experience drier summers overall, summer storms are likely to be more intense, and we are likely to see warmer but wetter winters in future, both of which will have a crucial bearing on the FFC’s operations. The risk and impacts of flooding are likely to increase over the coming years, so we will need to continue to adapt our services. As we look to the future it is clear that through collaboration and cooperation, together we can ensure that the UK can continue stay safe and thrive.”

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said: “It’s great to be back in Exeter to celebrate 10 highly successful years of this essential life-saving multi-agency service. The FFC is part of the heroic unseen efforts that go on 24/7 to help protect people and properties against the risk of flooding.

“Our flood defences reduce the risk of flooding, and our flood warnings help keep communities safe when it threatens. But we can never entirely eliminate the risk of flooding. Checking your flood risk on gov.uk is a crucial step towards protecting yourself, your loved ones and your home.”

Forecasting skills are constantly evolving and developing thanks to world leading, cutting-edge science and technology and the collaboration between the Met Office and the Environment Agency. With higher maximum daily temperatures and more intense rainfall affecting the UK the impacts of flooding are likely to be greater in coming decades. The ability to accurately forecast flood events will therefore become ever more important.

Met Office

© Crown Copyright